

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 10680

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINR, IS
SUBJECT: RUMORED NEW CONTENDER IN SUCCESSION SWEEPSTAKES

1. ISRAEL'S NEVER-IDLE RUMOR MILL HAS COME UP WITH A NEW ENTRANT IN THE STILL-INCHOATE SUCCESSION SWEEPSTAKES. HE IS YA'AKOV MERIDOR, FOUNDER AND BOARD CHARIMAN OF THE MAMMOTH (BY ISRAELI STANDARDS) SHIPPING FIRM, MARITIME FRUIT CARRIERS, LTD. MERIDOR, 64, SERVED IN THE FIRST THROUGH SIXTH KNESSETS (1949-1969) AS A HERUT MK BEFORE DECIDING TO QUIT POLITICS TO MAKE MONEY. RECENTLY, HE HAS BECOME ACTIVE AGAIN IN THE HERUT PARTY, APPARENTLY INTERESTED IN A POLITICAL COMEBACK.

2. MERIDOR'S ASSOCIATION WITH HERUT GOES BACK TO ITS GENESIS. IN FACT, HE WAS A CHARTER MEMBER OF HERUT'S PERCURSOR, THE IRGUN. HE SERVED AS ITS COMMANDER FROM 1941-43, STEPPING ASIDE FOR BEGIN, TO BECOME HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND.

3. WHAT KEEPS THE RUMOR MILLS GOING IS MERIDOR'S APPARENT CLOSENESS TO BEGIN, AS WELL AS HIS MANY YEARS OF SERVICE IN THE PARTY. HE HAS RECENTLY BEEN SEEN AT BEGIN'S HOME A NUMBER OF TIMES, LEADING TO SPECULATION THAT MERIDOR

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IS BEING GROOMED BY BEGIN TO SUCCEED HIM. ONE LIKUD LEADER, LA'AM'S MK EHUD OLMERT, TOLD US HE IS CONVINCED THAT BEGIN, AT THE VERY LEAST, HAS THE IDEA UNDER CONSIDERATION. OLMERT DESCRIBED MERIDOR AS A MAN WITH VERVE AND CHARISMA. HE IS AN ACTIVIST AND PRAGMATIST WHO SHARES BEGIN'S VIEWS ON FOREIGN POLICY. ACCORDING TO OLMERT, WITH A NOD FROM BEGIN, MERIDOR WOULD BE READILY ACCEPTABLE TO

ALL OF HERUT AND HE WOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE WINNING THE SUPPORT OF THE LIBERAL PARTY AND LA'AM AS WELL. ELMERT BELIEVES THAT THE PUBLIC WOULD ALSO TAKE TO MERIDOR AS A TRUE SUCCESSOR TO BEGIN.

4. ON THE OTHER HAND, A RELIABLE LABOR PARTY SOURCE TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT MERIDOR'S FINANCIAL AFFAIRS ARE IN CHAOS AND THAT HE COULD NOT POSSIBLY BE CONSIDERED FOR HIGH GOVERNMENT OFFICE AS HE IS ABOUT TO BE SUED BY IRATE FORMER PARTNERS AND INVESTORS. SOURCE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD BEGIN WAS CONSIDERING MERIDOR AS POSSIBLE NEW CHAIRMAN OF HERUT PARTY, FROM WHICH SPOT HE MIGHT EVENTUALLY MOVE INTO CABINET POST AT SOME POINT.

5. COMMENT: IN VIEW OF THE ANTIPATHY BETWEEN BEGIN AND WEIZMAN, AND THE DEARTH OF OTHER STRONG PERSONALITIES IN HERUT, BEGIN MAY BE CASTING ABOUT FOR A PROMISING HEIR. BUT, GIVEN MERIDOR'S AGE (64) AND HIS PRESENT POSITION FAR FROM THE CENTER RING, AT THE MOMENT HIS CANDIDACY REMAINS MUCH MORE RUMOR THAN ANYTHING ELSE.
LEWIS

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